

Michael F. Easley  
Governor



State of North Carolina  
Office of the Governor

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**GOV. EASLEY ANNOUNCES NEAR-RECORD 2005 ATTENDANCE AT STATE PARKS**

**RALEIGH** – Gov. Easley today announced that the state's parks and recreation areas recorded more than 12.3 million visits during 2005, one of the highest attendance levels in the 90-year history of the system. More than 400,000 citizens and visitors typically enjoy these areas during each of the winter months, finding a wide variety of opportunities to escape the season's doldrums.

"Exploring in our state parks is a tried and true way of exercising the mind and the body," Easley said. "Beyond the obvious health benefits, the experience offers a chance to reconnect with nature. Winter visitors often enjoy a degree of solitude that is not always easy to find during the busier, warm-weather months."

The 28 state parks and four state recreation areas are open year-round except for Christmas Day. When planning a winter outing, be sure to call ahead to confirm conditions as inclement weather, especially in western and northern areas, may close some parks for brief periods and on short notice.

There are no admission fees and activities, such as interpretive programs and ranger-led nature hikes, are held throughout the year. Some parks offer specialty programs, such as winter fishing, bird watching or astronomy that are tailored to the season. Many parks also offer exhibit halls where visitors can warm up while viewing museum-quality exhibits and videos that explore a park's special natural and cultural features. Additional special programs can be arranged for groups of children or adults.

There are some seasonal precautions that people should take to make their winter visits to state parks safe and enjoyable. Parks normally close during the season at 6 p.m., so plan your hikes accordingly, allowing time to return to your vehicle before the gates are closed. You may not need bug spray during the winter, but sunscreen and a hat is recommended. Also, it is wise to dress in layers as the comfort level fluctuates due to temperature extremes and physical activity.

For additional information about state parks and recreation areas, visit <http://www.ncsparks.net>.

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